

THE ONE UNWANTED

By RUBY AYRES

Author of "A Bachelor Husband," etc.
Copyright by Wheeler Syndicate, Inc.

THIS BEGINS THE STORY

Sally disappointed her family, who wanted a rich husband, and she married a poor one. Escapades lead to shipping her off to a Devon farm. Here she falls in love with Mark Anderson, a gentleman farmer, who proposes to her and she apparently rejects him, saying that he cannot afford to marry. Lionel Champion, an older man, also proposes to her. He has a mortgage on the property which she promises to cancel if Mark marries her, otherwise she is to marry him. Disillusioned, Sally returns home to London escorted by Champion. But she determines to plunge into social gaiety to forget her woes. She promises to marry Champion, despite the opposition of her old aunt, who had married unhappily. The aunt dies suddenly, leaving Sally a fortune. From Devon she hears Mark is ruined financially, which seems to explain his attitude toward her. But she is promised to Champion. However, she uses some of her money secretly to pay off Mark's mortgage, thinking a legacy from a relative supplied the money. Then unexpectedly she is thrown into contact with Mark at a dinner party.

Winnie had gone on; I suppose her joy of applause was even greater than her desire to see Mark, and in a moment my frock was freed. "I think that it is all right. It is not torn," he said.

I did not answer, and he raised his eyes. He had been sending over his task—and looked up at me.

The gray eyes I had loved so well were very dark in the subdued light, and as we stood there it seemed absurd that I had no longer had the right to go to him and raise my face to be kissed, and because the knowledge of the gulf between us hurt so unbearably I broke out, hardly knowing what I said:

"You seem to like Winnie, even if she isn't in the least like me."

And then, as he did not speak, I added passionately:

"Perhaps that is the reason why."

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Torture of Unrequited Love.

T WENT ON:

"Mr. Champion—Lionel, you know said that on our wedding day he would make you a present of the deed." I laughed. "I dare say he felt it was quite a safe offer, and he really believed we should marry, and he was quite right."

"It was a most generous offer," said Mark coolly, and his eyes were like gray steel, and his lips hard set.

"Oh, I don't know about generous. You see, I asked him to do it. I heard that he had the mortgage—Mr. Anderson told me—so I asked him to wipe it out as a wedding present."

"You—asked—him?"

"Yes, I did. It's the sort of thing I would never dare to do now."

And then I realized that Mrs. Fraser was vainly trying to catch my eye from the top of the table, and that the other ladies were rising. And I grabbed my handkerchief and vanity bag in swift confusion, and without another glance at Mr. Anderson followed in the train of extravagant frocks to the drawing room.

Mrs. Fraser came across the room to me at once, and wished she would turn attention to some one else, but she drew up a chair and sat down.

"So the wedding is to be soon—quite soon," she said.

"You are a very fortunate girl, Sally."

"Yes," I said.

I supposed my monosyllabic answers puzzled her, and evidently thinking I did not wish to discuss my wedding, she asked:

"How do you like Mr. Anderson? Such a handsome man. I think. He is a client of my brother's, you know."

"Yes—so he told me."

"I've seen him before, you know. I had a light as I could. When I was down in Devonshire in the winter."

She said in surprise: "Oh, have you?" and I could see a quick shudder of thought cross her face. Perhaps she had heard of my short-lived romance, and was putting two and two together, so I went on:

"I knew his cousin, too. I knew her well. Nina her name is, and she and Mr. Anderson are engaged."

Mrs. Fraser said: "Oh, indeed," rather disappointedly, and then presently, as if she had lost interest in the conversation, she moved away, and almost at once the men came in from the dining-room, and Lionel saw me immediately.

"Well," he said, and tried to smile. "I've hardly caught a glimpse of you all the evening."

"I caught a glimpse of you once, though," I said teasingly. "And you looked so thoroughly nasty and disagreeable I felt glad you and I had not gone in to dinner together."

"I should not have looked disagreeable if we had," he answered.

"Pooh! I don't be a Bluebeard, just because Mr. Anderson happened to be here. Mrs. Fraser never knew that we had met. And, even if all over and done with."

He tried to catch my hand, but I drew it away.

"Are you sure, Sally—sure?" he asked eagerly. "You looked so radiant at dinner. I should have thought you would be here again. But I could stand no more inquisition. I turned abruptly from him and joined a group of girls who were chattering together."

Winnie was one of them, and she drew me apart for a moment to whisper:

"Sally, that Mr. Anderson, is he your Mr. Anderson? Isn't he handsome? My dear, I don't wonder you were mad about him."

But I suffered cruelly when presently I saw her disappear into the long greenhouse adjoining the drawing room with Mark strolling beside her, and a sudden stabbing thought went through my heart.

Supposing he took a fancy to her? He was fairly well off, if not wealthy. And Winnie was sufficiently spoilt to manage to get her own way by fair means or foul. . . . and it was my money!

I was blind and deaf to everything that went on around me, my eyes were fixed on the door through which they must return.

Lionel came to me again.

"Fraser wants me to make up a hand at bridge—do you mind?"

"Of course not, please go."

He went reluctantly.

"If you want me," he said.

"I want you to go out in the hall and ring the gong till you come."

I interrupted flippantly, and I laughed in a silly, hysterical way at my own nonsense.

Lionel laughed, too, and he went off, looking quite satisfied. It is a wonderful thing how easily some men can be convinced that everything is all right! All right, when my heart was a-bore till I could bear no more; then, under cover of some noisy game being thumped out on the piano, I stole across to the curtained door. There was a sickly glow of dawn over the scene, and the place was lit with shaded lights, as I walked through the almost empty lounge to a lounge at the end, where I could see my sister and Mr. Anderson.

He rose to his feet when he saw me, and Winnie frowned.

"They want you," I said to her abruptly. "Mrs. Fraser wants you to go. Winnie rather fancied herself a singer."

"If they really want me," she said, she looked toward Mr. Anderson. "He would have done so only my flimsy arms just behind me, and I gave a little exclamation of annoyance."

"Let me help you. . . ."

"As if I loved you," I broke in, sobbing. "I do love you. I've never loved any one less. . . . What does a stupid engagement matter? I'd rather marry you without a shilling to your name than—than anything else. . . ."

My pride was down. I had forgotten that it was he who had sent me away. I only knew that he was the man for me, and that without him I could not bear my life. And I waited for what seemed an eternity of silence, broken only by his hard breathing. Then he gave a little inarticulate sound and moved toward me.

"Sally. . . ."

It was his voice that spoke my name, but it was another voice that caught it up from the curtained door of the greenhouse—caught it up on a note of unbearable pain and disbelief—and swinging round with a stifled cry I saw Lionel Champion standing there.

For a moment nobody spoke, then Lionel took a quick step toward me; his face was white, but he spoke composedly.

"This is my dance, I think."

He absolutely ignored Mark.

I drew back putting my hands behind me.

"No. . . . I can't dance with you again," I said breathlessly.

"My heart was beating like a wild thing. I hated him for having come at that moment; I wanted to be with Mark, to hear him say that he loved me, and to forget the misery of the past weeks."

Lionel drew himself up. He looked at Mark for the first time, and then back again at me.

"This is not the time or the place for a scene," he said, and I knew that it was hard work for him to speak so quietly. "You are engaged to me for this dance, Sally, and if there is anything to say—or this gentleman here—wish to say to me it can be said afterward, at a more suitable time."

I looked at Mark, but he stood unmoving, and I broke out painfully:

"It must be said now—at this moment, Lionel. I—"

I stopped, and looked at Mark with agonized eyes. Would he never speak?

"There was a tragic silence; then Lionel said:

"Sally, I beg of you, for your own sake, come with me now. This man can never be anything to you. If you know as much as I do about him you would not be here at this moment, humiliating yourself. I beg of you."

I ran past him and clasped my hands round Mark's arm.

"Why don't you say something—why don't you say something?" I asked him, sobbing. "You hear what he says, and you know that if you want me I will marry you rather than any other man in the world. . . ."

"Sally, for God's sake—" Lionel broke in.

I turned and faced him.

"It's true," I said passionately. "I love him, and I've always loved him. Mark—oh, Mark!"

He disengaged my hands from his arm very gently, but he kept them both in his as he spoke.

"I think it is for Miss Slater to choose," he said. "And, as she has done so on the honor to choose me—"

Lionel gave an enraged cry.

"The honor to choose you, you black-guard!" he roared. "I don't know how you've got the infernal impudence to stand there after what happened a month ago down in Devonshire."

He was purple with rage, and he could hardly articulate as he turned once more to me.

"You never knew why he gave you up, but you shall know now! He gave you up because your family offered to buy him off, that's why! They knew he was no suitable husband for you, and as they offered to buy him off he let you think that he did not care for you." Lionel's savage voice tore my heart like some sharp-tongued instrument, and I gave a sobbing cry of disbelief.

"I don't believe you—I don't believe you!"

"It's the truth!" he reiterated furiously. "It's the truth! Ask him if he didn't agree to let you go in return for enough money with which to pay the mortgage off his farm! Ask him, if you won't take my word! Look at him, and see which of us is speaking the truth."

I raised my eyes to Mark. Two dull patches of crimson stood out in his pallor, and his eyes were like steel.

"Mark is it the truth?" I could hardly speak, and I should have fallen but for his hands, to which I clung.

"Tell me—if you've any pity at all—is it the truth?"

"Yes!" He flung the word at me. "Yes, it's the truth—if that's all you care for! I did agree to let you go—as he says—for money."

CONTINUED TO

THE GUMPS—Dear Old Uncle

AND THE NEXT DAY UNCLE BIM, TRUE TO HIS WORD, CALLS ON THE GUMP FAMILY— BUT HE HAS CHANGED— HE'S NOT THE SAME UNCLE BIM



By Sidney Smith

SOMEBODY'S STENOG—The Week Starts Blue, But She'll Cheer Up



Copyright, 1921, by Public Ledger Company

By Hayward

The Young Lady Across the Way



The Cartoonist's Wife Helps Him Get an Idea



By Fontaine Fox

SCHOOL DAYS



By DWIG

PETEY—Now He's Gotta Start All Over



By C. A. Voight

GASOLINE ALLEY—Mother Arrives



By King